

Industrial Networks & Anarcho-syndicalism

ANARCHIST COMMUNIST DISCUSSION GROUP

The old ways of struggle have failed. Traditional trade unions, politicians and protest marches are ineffective in resisting attacks on the working class. What is needed is radical forms of resistance that are accessible, constructive, and at the same time, revolutionary. Could one solution be the formation of anarcho-syndicalist networks and assemblies, both in the workplace and our communities?

There are a few issues that could be discussed around Industrial Networks, and these relate to the debate around anarcho-syndicalism in general. Firstly, some clarification on the words 'network' and 'union' is needed. Other issues include the actual role of the network, membership (who can join), structure (union shop or mass assembly), and how it operates. These all relate to each other in some way, and will partly determine what kind of network will take shape.

Some possible definitions

The term 'union' is a tricky one. Many think 'union' simply means trade union, and associates all the faults of a 'trade union' with any other kind of 'union'. Others see 'union' in its original meaning — a group of workers — and let the adjective before it do the talking (anarcho-syndicalist union, rank-and-file union, trade union etc). Some use the term 'network' to describe the early phase of anarcho-syndicalist attempts at organising an anarchist-styled union. For others, it means exactly what it says, a network. What do we think the terms 'union' and 'network' means?

Role of the network

What is the network there to do? There are several roles networks in the past have played, including:

1. **a syndicalist propaganda group:** this is to simply spread anarcho-syndicalist propaganda in the workplace.
2. **informal network of workplace resistance groups:** not permanent but does link workplaces together.
3. **rank-and-file or syndicalist union:** open to most people, not anarchist specific, permanent.

4. **IWA initiative to create an anarcho-syndicalist union:** like SolFed, building dual power, specifically anarchist goals, permanent.

The role of the network will in part be influenced by, and in turn influence, the things below, and all come with their own issues.

Mass vs militant membership

Who can join the network? Is it open to all workers who loosely agree to direct action, self-management, solidarity (and could be quite big in membership but possibly water down its politics), or is it anarcho-syndicalist (clearly has revolution and anarchist communism in mind, revolutionary etc etc). Can union officials/ organisers (people who are employed full-time by unions) join? Is the goal to have a slightly more democratic union with mass membership, or is the goal quality, militant agitation along anarchist lines?

Representation vs assemblies

How does the network function? Is the goal to organise a workplace into a union, and then the union represents that workplace, either from afar or via one fixed delegate for that workplace (this is what traditional unions do, as well as the IWW). Or is the goal of the union to call mass assemblies at workplaces when needed, which then self-manages negotiations with the bosses?

Adhoc vs permanent

Is the network informal, adhoc and relatively loose, or is it permanent, with formal membership, dues, conferences ect?

The Anarchist-Communist Discussion Group meets at 7pm on the first Wednesday of every month at the WEA, 59 Gloucester St, Christchurch. All welcome!

Organised by Beyond Resistance and Aotearoa Workers Solidarity Movement.

beyondresistance.wordpress.com — awsm.org.nz